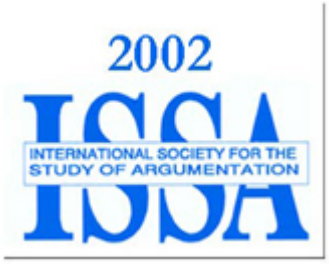
# ISSA Proceedings 2002 – Arguing National Missile Defense: Evaluating The Bush Administration's "New Framework" For Nuclear Security




*Abstract*

Addressing the National Defense University on May 1 of this year, President George W. Bush outlined a "new framework" for nuclear security in the post-Cold War world. This new framework is based on two key policy moves. First, the United States will develop and deploy a robust National Missile Defense (NMD). Second, it will reduce its nuclear arsenal to a minimal "credible" level. In light of the dangers that nuclear weapons pose and given the historic difficulties in sustaining support for missile defense this essay examines the Bush Administration's arguments for NMD. Following the direction Edward Schiappa provides in *Warranting Assent*, this essay evaluates the Bush Administration's justification for NMD. The essay considers what the NMD arguments accomplish for the administration. This essay maintains that the Bush Administration is arguing for NMD because it is a necessary component of an overall policy of extending nuclearism from the Cold War to the post-Cold War world.

The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists Board of Directors in March/April of 2002 moved the "Doomsday Clock" from nine to seven minutes to midnight. Despite the initial promise of reducing the nuclear threat after the close of the superpower conflict, this is the third time the clock's hands have been moved closer to midnight in the post-Cold War era (*Bulletin* 2002). The specter of nuclear terrorism is growing and India and Pakistan stand perilously close to a nuclear conflict, which should remind us of Robert Manning's warning several years ago that "the likelihood of nuclear use – either in a regional conflict or by terrorists – is probably greater now than in the bipolar superpower era" (1997-1998: 70-71). Even as threats grow, we have yet to see substantial qualitative movement away from nuclearism.

Both the Bush Sr. and the Clinton administrations were progressing on a trajectory of reducing the number of nuclear weapons through verified and binding arms control agreement. But struck by the perceived lack of progress, credentialed anti-nuclear voices since the mid-1990s have sought to bring the debate over nuclear policy from the technical to the public sphere, encouraging public moral argument about U.S. nuclear weapons policy and explicitly advocating a massive and fundamental change in U.S. nuclear policy. These nuclear "abolitionists" have challenged the nuclear establishment's exclusive purview over public policy argument, criticized current force structure policy, and the very necessity of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War world (Prosise 2000). Partly in response to such criticism, the Bush administration has recently reframed the public debate over nuclear weapons, claiming to offer an alternative to Cold War nuclearism, and, implicitly, nuclear abolition as well ("President Bush's" 2001)**(i)**. This "new framework" is explicitly intended to reduce the dangers of nuclear weapons and enhance the security of the United States and its allies by maintaining maximum nuclear flexibility and by shielding vital interests from ballistic missile attacks. While Bush is offering an alternative to Cold War nuclearism, it has not "clashed" with these abolitionists' arguments directly. Indeed, the Bush administration has barely acknowledged the abolitionists, but they were in the minds of those who crafted the new post-Cold War nuclear posture, informed Bush's new framework, and set the ground for the recent May arms control accord with Russia ("Rationale" 2001; see also, Doa 2002; Gordon May 9, 2001).

On May 1, 2001, in a speech to the National Defense University, President George W. Bush outlined this new nuclear "framework" and a centerpiece of the proposal is the development of a robust National Missile Defense (NMD). Bush's principal claim to be leaving behind the legacy of the Cold War with the new posture is a bold one and is certainly important to consider now because it sets a new direction and standard for post-Cold War nuclearism. This essay is an argument evaluation that assesses the correspondence between articulated policy moves and the stated goals of that policy. Key to the evaluation of the merits of Bush's arguments for NMD is a consideration of whether it moves toward or away from the explicit goal of enhancing nuclear security and reducing the danger nuclear weapons pose to human populations. This public policy argument offers an opportunity to understand how NMD relates to other elements of the new nuclear posture. What purpose does NMD serve in this new framework? What can the

arguments for NMD tell us about the direction of nuclear policy in the post-Cold War? What are the elements of the legacy to be left behind and what is to be extended with the new stance? The essay considers the May 1 address in addition to subsequent administration comments about nuclear weapons policy and NMD, including elements of the recently leaked Nuclear Posture Review and the May arms control accord between the U.S. and Russia. Following a brief discussion of argument evaluation and critical nuclear studies, the essay considers the new framework, followed by several implications that follow from the analysis of the administration's argument.

*1. Argument Evaluation of Nuclear Discourse*

Edward Schiappa's 1996 Book *Warranting Assent* calls for wider recognition of argument evaluation as an important and legitimate scholarly approach to the study of communication. He outlines three traditional impediments to the practice of argument evaluation. The first is the ephemeral/enduring distinction, articulated by Campbell. The second is the "trust-avoidance" criterion that essentially questions critics' "privileging" of truth. The third is the criterion of "non-partisanship" in criticism. Schiappa points out that each of these criteria impede the practice of argument evaluation, a process that necessitates explicit normative evaluation of public policy arguments. Furthermore, the criteria preclude an important approach to the study of communication uniquely suitable for a significant part of our academic community. While it is an approach appropriate for myriad topics, this essay focuses on the evaluation of public argument over nuclear policy and I maintain that argument evaluation is a particularly useful and potentially significant way in which better understand out current nuclear predicament.

As the essay focuses on such a salient public policy issue, the evaluation of the discourse will certainly bump against the criteria discussed above. For one thing, it is a case study, involving an immediate, salient, fluid issue. Second, I do not seek to "privilege" my voice. This essay is an evaluation of the argument, involving criticism of public discourse, and it will have to be evaluated as an argument itself. This treatment is not intended to be the end word on the subject, but simply part of a conversation. Third, it is difficult to be detached and dispassionate about a public issue of such profound importance and consequence. In that the ideas expressed in the study are intended to promote thought and conversation, advocacy, at some level, is a necessity.

Not only is Schiappa correct in challenging the three criteria that limit argument

evaluation in our scholarly field, but in the realm of nuclear public policy discourse argument evaluation is a most important, potentially significant way for rhetorical and argument critics to serve our larger communities. As Brummett (1998) argues for politically responsive research, there is no issue that is more important for communication scholars to study than nuclear discourse. Argument evaluation is a very accessible means by which scholars can inform both technical and lay audiences.

The present evaluation is part of a body of critical nuclear studies, a broad-based approach spanning several disciplines and perspectives that reached a height in the late 1980s (Taylor 1998). While this movement includes many perspectives and approaches, in communication studies a number of important works have come from argument scholars. For example, the *Journal of the American Forensic Association* devoted a special issue to nuclear discourse in 1988. Sadly, one of the best critics of nuclear discourse has left the field. Her efforts, however, are examples of the quality of argument studies of nuclear discourse. Rebecca Bjork's work on Reagan's SDI rhetoric as a response to anti-nuclear voices, effectively co-opting their anti-nuclear ground, points out the merits of such case-studies because through such analysis we better understand public advocacy and argumentative strategies over nuclear technology in the public sphere (1988). Her (1996) treatment of George Bush Sr.'s advocacy for Theatre Missile Defense (TMD), a chapter in Schiappa's book, points out the hidden and ideological assumptions behind justifications for missile defense technology. She argues that this advocacy is based in orientalist and colonial assumptions and that the argument for TMD is instrumental to continued military subordination of third world countries. It is my contention that George W. Bush's recent reframing of the nuclear debate deserves similar, if not more attention. This is the first major effort made by an administration to publicly redefine nuclearism since the fall of the Soviet Union and it will shape our understanding of nuclear weapons and policy in the post-Cold War era, setting the direction for U.S. nuclear posture for decades.

*2. Bush's New Framework*

Bush's primary theme grounding subsequent claims is that our world is fundamentally changed and different. In this way, he begins to address criticism that the U.S. has not moved substantially from Cold War nuclear policy without dealing directly with the details of abolitionists' criticism. Essentially depicting a

scenic change by highlighting the U.S. position in a new time and era, Bush states that if we were to look back thirty years to 1971 we would see as forefront a conflict with Russia and the specter of nuclear annihilation. In this way he sets the table for one of his central goals, which is the abandonment the ABM Treaty so that work on NMD may proceed rapidly. At that time, Bush continues, Mutually Assured Destruction, a theory where "survival" is "insured by leaving both sides completely open and vulnerable to nuclear attack," would have been eroded by the development of ballistic missile defenses. Defenses are inherently destabilizing in such a framework because the "mutual" element of assured destruction is relatively diminished. But the Soviet Union is no more and since we are living in the post-Cold War world, Bush explains, we must modify our views and policies to better account for our new reality.

The new environment requires new nuclear security approaches. While an old danger has diminished, new dangers have emerged. We live, Bush opines, in a "less predictable" world; a world in which more nations have nuclear weapons and even more nations aspire to acquire them. We live in a world when the threat of weapons of mass destruction is increasing and the means of delivering those weapons with ballistic missiles is also becoming more widespread. Bush warns that the U.S. must expect even more proliferation, a most significant premise that will be discussed at greater length later in the essay.

For Bush, those states seeking to acquire WMDs and means of delivering them "include some of the world's least-responsible states." Giving presence to this risk construction, the threat trumps even the "thousands of ballistic missiles in" Russian hands, because even a "small number of missiles in the hands of" those "for whom terror and blackmail are a way of life" presents an unacceptable condition. Where Reagan argued that we needed SDI because of the horror posed by nuclear weapons, Bush does not speak of the horror of the weapons, but rather maintains a theme developed at the inception of the nuclear age; the threat of nuclear weapons comes principally by the nature of those who wield them.

Thus, there are two primary reasons for the necessity of NMD. First, the U.S. must protect itself from a ballistic missile attack. According to Bush, these "irresponsible states" hate the U.S.; they hate "democracy," "freedom," and "individual liberty." Since such leaders do not even care about their own citizens, deterrence is no longer an adequate defensive guarantee. We require "more than the grim premise that we can destroy those who seek to destroy us." Therefore, in a most intriguing claim, the U.S. must take advantage of "an important opportunity for the world to rethink the unthinkable and find new ways to keep

the peace."
Second, the U.S. needs to be able to defend regions where these bad actors "intimidate their neighbors," but these states' acquisition of weapons could prevent the U.S and "other responsible nations" from exerting influence in regional conflicts. Read another way, the problem is not necessarily that deterrence is obsolete but that in such cases deterrence would be mutual. The U.S. and its allies could be deterred from regional intervention and such asymmetrical deterrence is clearly unacceptable. Bush argues that had Iraq had nuclear weapons the Gulf War would have turned out much differently.

Specifically, according to Bush, the new framework, informed by the Nuclear Posture Review, includes four prongs. First, the U.S. must engage in "a broad strategy of active nonproliferation" to "deny weapons of terror" to those irresponsible states. Second, the U.S. must engage in "counterproliferation," a strategy where U.S. action may be taken to deny or destroy certain states' nuclear programs or arsenals. Third, the U.S. must develop a National Missile Defense against these irresponsible states. Finally, the U.S. must continue to "deter anyone who would contemplate their use." However, standing in the way of this new framework is "the 30-year old ABM treaty." Described as a relic of the Cold War, it prevents the U.S. from effectively "addressing today's threats."
While admitting he does not know what the end state of the system will look like, the U.S. will succeed and deploy the defenses. Bush states that the U.S. must pursue "near-term options," "deploying an initial capability against limited threats." But he goes on to say that the administration is committed to a robust defense, as it will consider land and sea-based interceptors, and defenses that will destroy ballistic missiles in their boost, mid-term, and re-entry phases.
Immediately after stating that the U.S. will deploy NMD, Bush says that the U.S. will consult friends and allies, and that these will be "real consultations." He states: "we are not presenting our friends and allies with unilateral decisions already made," a claim in tension with the clear commitment that the U.S. will *deploy* NMD. In addition, the Bush administration unilaterally withdrew from the 1972 ABM Treaty, despite Russian objections; it originally pushed for an informal rather than binding agreement to reduce nuclear weapons; and it has demanded that the U.S. will store rather than disassemble and destroy nuclear warheads, again despite strenuous Russian objections. Furthermore, the U.S. has downplayed the importance of verification procedures in arms control, suggesting that a "hand shake" should be good enough. Although, the Bush administration

would compromise on this by agreeing to a binding treaty in the May accord, it has maintained its commitment to NMD despite the objections of European friends and allies. Furthermore, the May accord does nothing to address concerns over NMD and is based on maximum nuclear flexibility (Wines May 14, 2002).

Bush continues in the address by speaking of "other interested states," pledging that the U.S. will "reach out to" them. These interested states are principally Russia and presumably China, but the focus of the May 1 address is Russia, with no direct mention of China. In a seeming reversal of basic logic, Bush argues that we must abandon the ABM Treaty because it "perpetuates a relationship based on mutual distrust and vulnerability." The ABM Treaty was designed to keep mutual vulnerability in tact, itself a response to distrust and vulnerability rather that the cause of it. In the dizzying logic of nuclear policy, this mutual vulnerability was intended to reduce the distrust, not to enhance it. But, as stated earlier, the basic problem is that anti-ballistic missile defenses limit the mutual element of the vulnerability.

Wrapping up the justification for the U.S. abandonment of the ABM Treaty, Bush returns again to the initial reframing of the global scene. The post-Cold War needs a "framework" reflecting the new reality. The U.S. must make a "clean and clear break from the past" and move beyond the "adversarial legacy of the Cold War." Our relationship with Russia must be "reassuring, rather than threatening"; it must be "premised on openness, mutual confidence, and real opportunities for cooperation." Formally announcing the U.S. withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty on December 13, 2001, in his Rose Garden comments, Bush proclaimed: "we are moving to replace Mutually Assured Destruction with mutual cooperation" ("U.S. withdrawal" 2002). President Vladimir Putin, in a position of weakness, disgruntle is his acceptance of the U.S. withdrawal, called the Bush administration's action "a mistake" (Hutcheson, Montgomery, and Kuhnhenn 2001). Since then Putin has been rewarded for not making an international scene over the U.S. withdrawal. Cooperation, however, hardly seems balanced.

*3. Assessing the Difference of the New Framework*

Bush has boldly called for a new nuclear framework; a policy fundamentally different from Cold War nuclearism. There are differences, of course. These include:

1. the elimination of obsolete treaties;

2. the formulation of new agreements;
3. articulation of new threats;
4. new uses for nuclear weapons;
5. reductions in the raw numbers of deployed strategic weapons; and
6. a relative shift away from the mantra of deterrence. We should note these changes, but we should also assess and evaluate the implications of these changes and consider elements of nuclearism that are being extended in the post-Cold War world through this new posture.

Despite proclamations that the U.S. has entered into a landmark treaty, there are limitations in this new nuclear framework. A key element heralded as a grand accomplishment by the administration is the substantial reduction in deployed strategic nuclear weapons. However, the proposed size of U.S. strategic force is basically the same as it was before the Bush administration: "reductions largely follow already established force structure analysis conducted by Stratton back in the early to mid-1990s." Furthermore, "President Bush's 'new strategic framework' is based on old strategic assumptions about the triad, credible deterrent, and counterforce targeting that guided Cold War nuclear policy" (Kristensen 2001: para. 4). The new agreement is also a public extension of the Nuclear Posture Review, which intends to "provide maximum flexibility," even while the U.S. reduces active strategic weapons (Gordon 2002: A8+. Lexis).
There are still far too many strategic nuclear weapons, not to mention tactical nuclear weapons which are not even covered by the recent agreement ("No frills" 2002). While Bush argues that we must abandon MAD, even before the May arms accord Kimball argued that 1,700 to 2,200 are more than enough weapons to assure destruction (2002).
The three and a half page treaty with Russia, described as "a model of simplicity" ("No frills" 2002: A18+), pledges both countries to reducing their active strategic nuclear weapons to between 1,700 and 2,000 by the year 2012. The numbers are also barely below what Start III would have been – between 2,200 and 2,500 strategic nuclear weapons (Bose 2001). Interestingly, the primary stipulation is that each country reach these force levels by 2012, the same year the treaty is "set to expire" (Gordon 2002: A8+).

Another troublesome element of the new framework is that the administration's numbers do not count those nuclear weapons that have been dismantled but stored for possible reassembly and use at a later date. The numbers are

artificially low as the weapons are hidden rather than accounted for, dismantled and destroyed (Kimball 2001). This is precisely what is codified in the May accord (Gerstenzang and Daniszewki 2002). Thus, there is no transparency in the agreement even as it is heralded as initiating a new era in trust (see also, Grier and Weir 2002). Indeed, the U.S. has veered from the trajectory toward "transparency and irreversibility" encouraged by the Start process and reaffirmed in 1995 between President Clinton and President Yeltsin. The ostensible reasons for the 1995 action were twofold. First, there was concern over nuclear security in Russia and the possibility of "loose nukes." Second, they were responding to the pressure to act in a manner consistent with Article VI of the NPT (Kristensen, "The Unruly" 2001). The new posture complicates both issues.

While the Bush administration commits to openness, it rejects transparency and action that will constrain U.S. nuclear options. The Bush administration supports the goal of mutual confidence, but downplays Russian concerns over the "hedge" strategy, the importance of the ABM Treaty, and the destabilizing nature of NMD. Kristensen warns that the "hedge"- a policy based on the ability to rapidly redeploy strategic nuclear weapons – reduces transparency and sends "a dangerous signal of intent that connotes deceit in our relations with Russia." According to Kimball, "Bush has apparently rejected ideas contained in the Start III framework that would make reductions irreversible through verified dismantlement and destruction of delivery systems and warheads" (Kimball 2001: para. 4). Older, and still undefined, verification methods will accompany the new accord, although the method of enforcing compliance is unclear (Gerstenzang and Daniszewski 2002). So the new framework actually moves the two countries away from some encouraging progress in the post-Cold War world.

Perhaps even more worrisome is that the desired flexibility is crucial because the weapons are intended to offer even more utility than they did in the Cold War. In "apparently… the first time that an official list of potential target countries has come to light," leaks of the Nuclear Posture Review revealed that seven countries are now explicit targets of U.S. nuclear weapons, including Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Libya (Richter 2002). Fundamentally the NPR outlines the enhanced utility of nuclear weapons, including a greater role for tactical nuclear weapons. In addition, the criteria for the legitimate use of nuclear weapons is being expanded, now including a new category of legitimate use, which according to the NPR is "in the event of surprising military developments" (Richter 2002: A1+. Lexis). In this way, the new framework also overlaps with a

grander strategy of counter-proliferation. Bush's "axis of evil" rhetoric is largely concerned Iraqi, Iranian, and North Korean efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Policy expectations are further defined in Bush's recent address to the graduating class at WestPoint, where he outlined a new foreign policy direction: American will strike first at those nations who harbor or sponsor terrorism or who are developing weapons of mass destruction ("President Bush" 2002).

A fundamental inconsistency between the instrumental and the terminal goals exists, then, if we can reasonably assume that the direction of U.S. nuclear weapons policy will actually encourage proliferation and further enhance the motivation to acquire and test weapons. While seeking to enhance defense, NMD encourages other nations to develop even more robust nuclear arsenals. There is both direct and indirect encouragement. This essay considers more thoroughly the indirect encouragement, but suffice it to say, for now, that the direct encouragement is evident in one example. China, a nation with 20 ICBMs tipped with nuclear weapons, responded to Bush's NMD moves with plans to MIRV its weapons and to have up to 100 ICBMs targeting the U.S. by 2015 (Lumpkin 2002).

Beyond this, the indirect consequences of the new nuclear framework should also concern us. This promotion of the utility of the weapons and the clear commitment to nuclear possession is in tension with the sprit of Article VI of the Non Proliferation Treaty. The 1970 NPT is the most successful and broad-based nuclear treaty ever, maintaining "near universal membership," involving 187 countries. It has largely prevented the spread of these weapons of mass destruction. Establishing two classes of states, Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) and Non-Nuclear Weapons States (NNWS), the agreement pledges NNWS to forgo proliferation in exchange for help in developing peaceful nuclear energy. However, Article VI of the treaty "commits the NWS [Nuclear Weapons States] to 'pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament…" ("Fact Sheet" 2002).

Far from embracing nuclear abolition or the spirit of the Non-Proliferation Treaty's Article VI, Bush forcefully states in his May 1 address that "nuclear weapons still have a vital role to play in our security and that of our allies." The U.S. can reduce the size and change the composition and character of its nuclear forces and still maintain "a credible deterrent." The U.S. will maintain a robust

and diversified nuclear force, at “the lowest possible numbers.” The flexibility inherent in the recent accord affords the U.S. plenty of latitude, and “a senior Bush official” opined that “there may be requirements for us to have nuclear capabilities far into the future” (Greene 2002: A1+).

The clear emphasis on flexibility, targeting, research and development on new nuclear weapons, to name just a few items of the new nuclear rhetoric, are clearly antithetical to the NPT. Beyond the specific violation of Article VI, it is precisely the commitment to possession of nuclear weapons for any foreseeable future that impedes efforts to enforce the taboo against the acquisition of nuclear weapons. The crisis between India and Pakistan is just the most salient of recent threats, but it is surely not the last if such a posture is maintained by the U.S. Abolitionists argue that it is the possession of these weapons and the clear commitment to their utility that sends the message to others of their legitimacy and importance of the weapons for international stature. It is this argument that the administration and possessionists have yet to come to grips with publicly.

Fundamentally, this is why NMD is such a central aspect of Administration’s new nuclear policy. Arguing for NMD essentially allows the administration to sidestep the double-standard/legitimation argument, begging a central question raised by abolitionists, offering instead a vision of a safe and secure world at another level.

NMD is the result of the perceived need for the possession of nuclear weapons because the possession both encourages to acquire and potential use the weapons, and because it limits the U.S.’s ability to effectively criticize those states that develop nuclear weapons. The new framework is premised on the inevitability of nuclear utility. Thus, it is the commitment to possession that necessitates the development of NMD.

One should note a bit of tension in the argument. NMD will provide security and safety, theoretically, in an increasingly insecure and unsafe world – a world where nuclear weapons will become an ever-present and increasing threat. Arguments for NMD would also seem to undercut the faith the public is supposed to put in U.S. non-proliferation and counter-proliferation efforts. But fundamental to both tensions is the U.S. posture that drives nations and non-state actors to acquire nuclear weapons. The continued reliance on nuclear weapons and the subsequent requirement that NMD protect us from future threats is a dizzying element of the new post-Cold War nuclear logic.

*4. Terrorism and September 11*

Arguments for NMD defense are partly bundled with the new anti-terrorist

rhetoric, a result of the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, which provided an opportunity for the Bush administration to further justify NMD. In a statement released by the White House on December 13, 2001, Bush committed to pulling out of the ABM Treaty, partly because of September 11. Terrorists and rogues, after all, pose the greatest threat, and "because the Cold War is long gone… we leave behind one of its last vestiges" ("President Discusses" 2001). More recently, Bush espoused: "As the events of Sept. 11 make clear, we no longer live in the Cold War world for which the (treaty) was designed" ("Bush pushes" 2002: 14A). But in assessing the terrorist threat we need to consider again the indirect consequences likely to result from proposed policy.

While the Bush administration is reframing the nuclear threat in the post-Cold War, the insecurity of Russian nuclear materials remains and is even increased by the new posture. The threat of "loose nukes" looms even as the Bush Administration fails to heed recommendations by a bipartisan report sponsored by the Department of Energy to vastly increase funding for the Comprehensive Threat Reduction (CTR) or Nunn-Lugar program – a program was designed to secure, dismantle and destroy Russian nuclear weapons (Bleek 2002).

Even beyond the misplaced priorities – the massive funding for NMD compared to the paltry sums for CTR – The Bush administrations actions do not seem to be fostering the kind of trust and openness necessary for the goals of CTR to be realized. Cirincione and Wolfstal (2001) point out that central to successful efforts to control this threat the U.S. and Russia must cooperate fully and openly. The May accord is heralded as a culmination of "mutual trust" between the U.S. and Russia ("The Words" 2002: A8), but it is little more than the "handshake" agreement that Bush wanted in Crawford, Texas. The arms accord encourages Russia to store rather than destroy nuclear materials, decreasing transparency and increasing the risk that nuclear materials will be diverted (Miller 2002). These storage facilities present a substantial risk because their "security is rated uncertain at best, even by the administration's own recent intelligence estimates" (Miller 2002: A1+). Furthermore, the Bush administration also recently informed Russia that it would "curtail a number or aid programs that help Russia keep control of its weapons of mass destruction" (Wines 2002: A8+). In short, the new framework will increase the availability of nuclear materials to non-state actors.

While the U.S. plans to have a NMD to protect from such threats, such a defense protects, if it works, from ballistic missile attacks only. But what of alternative means of delivery? Jay Hancock reports that "the most probable vehicle for a U.S-

targeted nuclear bomb… is not the one Bush has focused on… Instead, people wishing to kill Americans with a nuclear explosion are far more likely to steal or buy a bomb from Russia and smuggle it into the United States by truck or ship" (Hancock 2001: A1+. Lexis). Russia is among those who have argued that September 11th demonstrated that terrorism is a much larger threat than a ballistic missile attack ("Fact sheet" 2001). Furthermore, for ballistic missiles to be a threat a bad actor must first acquire a nuclear warhead. Russia is the key source for such material, presenting a superceding threat.

*5. Nuclear Taboo*

Bush's new nuclear framework along with the "Axis of Evil" rhetoric further normalizes nuclear possession and use, even as it claims to protect the U.S. and its allies against weapons of mass destruction. The "nuclear taboo," a normative constraint against their use, is denuded by this post-Cold War nuclear stance. Utility of nuclear weapons is unequivocally explicit in U.S. policy. This enhanced extension of the nuclear double-standard, criticized so clearly by India and Pakistan when they recently joined the nuclear club, is one of the central implications of Bush's new nuclear framework.

According to the *Washington Post,* "The vagueness of the NPR with regard to the mission of deterring rogue states will likely encourage the nuclear laboratories to believe that it is a mandate to develop new weapons" (Arkin 2001: para 15). But it is more than just the perception that is important. The U.S. is now actively encouraging the development of new types of usable nuclear weapons with bunker-busting delivery systems ("U.S. to Begin" 2002). The message to the world should not be too hard to understand. By limiting the fundamental impediment against the use of nuclear weapons and by laying the groundwork for acceptability of use, the dangers seem immensely enhanced. With the administrations commitment of nuclear weapons for any foreseeable future comes the signal of legitimacy and the double standard that limits its ability to lead effectively in non-proliferation policy. This may be why the administration is seeming to rely more on something know as counter-proliferation, which we may be witnessing the first stages of in the Axis of Evil rhetoric.

Scott Sagan (1996/1997) argues that for too long models and theories of nuclear acquisition have been based on realist assumptions about nuclear security. Largely neglected but still terribly importantly, however, is the symbolic element of nuclear weapons policy and possession. States seek to acquire nuclear weapons

to gain international stature and symbolic prestige: the weapons are "normative symbols of modernity and identity" (55; see also, Bracken 2000; Perkovich 1998). For Pakistan, developing the bomb was not simply perceived as a means of national security; it was a "source of national pride and a symbol of defiance against western double standards" (Kahn 1998: para. 4). The motivation for India's acquisition has been described in similar ways (Bracken 2000). What must the U.S. do then to reduce the threats associated with proliferation? According to Sagan, the U.S. must fundamentally change the international view of these weapons in order to halt proliferation and work to establish a "norm against all nuclear weapons possession" (84).

Bush concludes that the need a "new, realistic way to preserve peace," but the policy is antithetical to Sagan's sage advice. It is precisely in the Bush administration's bold claims that we see the most striking limitation of the new framework for nuclear security. By proclaiming to have liquidated "the legacy of the Cold War," leaving its vestiges behind us once and for all, the administration is fulfilling the warning issues by George Lee Butler years before. In a speech to the Henry Stimson Center, Butler concluded:

What a stunning, perverse turn of events: in the words of my friend Jonathan Schell, we face the dismal prospect that: "the Cold War was not the apogee of the nuclear age, to be succeeded by an age of nuclear disarmament. Instead, it may well prove to have simply been a period of initiation, in which not only Americans and Russians, but Indians and Pakistanis, Israelis and Iraqis, were adapting to the horror of threatening the deaths of millions of people, were learning to think about the unthinkable. If this is so, will history judge that the Cold War proved to be a modern day Trojan Horse, whereby nuclear weapons were smuggled into the life of the world, made an acceptable part of the way the world works? Surely not, surely we still comprehend that to threaten the deaths of tens of millions of people presages an atrocity beyond anything in the record of mankind. Or have we, in a silent and incomprehensible moral revolution, come to regard such threats as ordinary, as normal and proper policy for any self-respecting nation" (Butler 1997: 236).

As Bush's argument makes clear, liquidating the legacy of the Cold War does not include delegitimating nuclear weapons as useful tools of statecraft and military intervention. It thus does not seek denude the acceptance of the possession and acquisition of these weapons as signs of international power and prestige. The Bush administration's effort is essentially the normalization of nuclear weapons in

the post-Cold War, extending their essential utility to the national security of the nation. National Missile Defense is an essential defensive component for a new nuclear policy that encourages nuclear proliferation, leakage, and terrorism. It is an essential element of the casuistic stretching done to extend nuclear weapons from mere relics and things of the Cold War to vital and essential elements of a strong nation, regardless of era.

We are passing a key opportunity. In particular, students of nuclear discourse must begin to explore the fundamental ways in which U.S. foreign policy, inherently imbued with myths of exceptionalism and mission, are tangled with nuclear weapons. It is no longer enough to see these as relics of the Cold War. There seems to be a more fundamental, perhaps cultural and symbolic element to nuclearism that we must begin to understand better.

The administration's public argument can be read as successful at least in one sense. It has captured the headlines, further muting abolitionists' voices. As Mathew Miller notes, with all the focus on the Bush administrations new nuclear posture, the credentialed and credible voices for abolition are receiving virtually no public attention (2002). The arguments for NMD are derivative of the assumption that nuclear weapons are a necessary element of effective U.S. foreign policy. Sidestepping abolitionists' arguments, Bush's premise is that living, relying, and fearing nuclear weapons is a given; U.S. possession, as well as other countries possession and acquisition, is an inevitability. This suggests that the key argument that presidential administrations need to address is the utility of nuclear weapons. They must begin to make that part of the public discussion, not to simply assume it and more policy from there. It is up to scholars, activists, and the public alike to make this the point of stasis. Argument evaluation and developing criticism of such administrative moves in scholarly and public contexts is vital. Argument evaluation provides an accessible means to do so and thus we should embrace it more in our scholarship in order to enhance our ability to serve a broader community.

NOTES

**i.** All quotations from President Bush come from this text unless otherwise cited.

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